

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

natural power more freely than He did afterwards, when the evident peril of His being treated as merely a wonder-worker inspired a restraint, which only urgent need and confident faith could overcome. Had the evangelist been possessed by the desire for miracle-mongering, he would assuredly not have been content with noting only the failure of the signs to produce the kind of faith which Jesus desired, and to which He could trust His person and His cause.

ALFRED E. GARVIE.

THE ETERNAL LOVE AND CHRISTIAN UNITY.

THERE is an utterance in our Lord's great High-priestly Prayer as given in the 17th Chapter of St. John's Gospel which has not received in general the attention it deserves. Indeed, it is only since the publication of the R.V. that the words referred to have been open to the ordinary Bible reader. But they are very important in themselves and in their bearing on the vital matter of Christian Unity. They occur in the 23rd verse, where Jesus, praying for the unity of believers, says: "that the world may know that thou didst send me, *and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me.*" The words specially referred to are those in italics, which are rendered in the A.V., "and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me," which might be taken as denoting a love arising in time merely, and has been generally so taken. But *ἠγάπησας* is the Aorist, rightly rendered in R.V. as "lovedst," referring to action in past time. The difference from the A.V. might be still more plainly seen were we to render *ἠγάπησας* "didst love (them)" as *ἀπέστειλας* immediately preceding is rendered by R.V. "didst send (me)." The prayer also concludes with the words: "that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may

be in them," where again we have in A.V. the misleading "hast loved me," instead of "lovedst me."

The question which has sometimes been discussed, whether the English Perfect may not often best express the Greek Aorist, need not trouble us here. When in the 24th verse, where Jesus speaks of *His* being loved by the Father, the A.V. renders the word by "lovedst," and in the 23rd verse, where He refers to the love of the Father for His *disciples*, it is rendered "hast loved," the fact that the very same word is in the original used of the Father's love for Him and for His disciples is certainly concealed from the English reader. In any case the reference is to something in the past. It may be noted that the American Revisers in their final issue adhere to the E.R.V. rendering.

I.

Now, Jesus says that the love wherewith the Father loved Him was a love in Eternity—"before the foundation of the world" (verse 24), just as in verse 5 He speaks of "the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Therefore, when He prays in the 23rd verse, "that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them even as thou lovedst me," it is affirmed that believers in Christ were loved by God with the same love wherewith the Father loved Christ, which was a love, not merely in time, but in Eternity—"before the foundation of the world." The same conclusion follows from the prayer "that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them" (verse 26); for unless they were loved with the same Eternal love, how could that love be in them, or Christ be in them? If this be so, where can we find a higher, more inspiring and elevating truth? But it is the same thing as Paul teaches when in Colossians he says that *in Christ* were all things created—in Christ, "the Son

of His Love." If God *is* Love no other creative motive is conceivable than the Love that He is. But this Love must have an object. Paul says that the object of this Love was "the Son," in Whom *all* were created, and here it is said to have been Christ and also those who believed in Him, or were united to Him in faith and life. In His creative Vision God beheld, not one Son only, but "many sons" in whom He should rejoice, brought to Him through the manifestation of the one Son. As the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews also says: "It became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Hence Jesus says here also: "the glory which thou hast given me I have given them; that they may be one even as we are one." This could not have been said unless their relation to God in sonship should be *essentially* the same as His own, while He remains "the first-born among many brethren," and was "the first-born of all Creation." That it was not merely after they believed that God loved them appears also from the statement: "thine they were, and thou gavest them to me." As Paul also says, we were chosen *in Christ* before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4).

Science cannot give us the least hint as to the motive or the ultimate purpose of the Creation which it studies. We cannot fail to ask ourselves what these can be. If we say that it was *man* that God had in view, a moment's reflection shows us that it cannot have been man as a race existing in time merely or on the earth. For whatever height man may here reach, not only must the individual, with all he may have gained of outward or inward possession, but the race itself, perish from off the earth. This earth cannot be the abode of life for ever, and even if it could, what of the myriads that have been and still are constantly

passing away from it? How welcome, therefore, the revelation that what God had in view was man in the image of the eternal Sonship, that the motive of the creation was the Divine vision of those who should share in the life of Sonship towards Himself—a love for them—that the Divine purpose was to create sons and daughters to Himself, human children sharing in 'the Divine life, which is not of Time merely, but Eternal. We cannot by any possibility get beyond this; there can be nothing higher. And there can be nothing more worthy as the creative purpose than the desire of the Divine Love to spread itself abroad and make finite beings sharers in the Divine Eternal Life. There can be no more satisfying conception of human Destiny. For the Divine Life is the all-perfect life of Love, above or beyond which thought cannot go. That this is God's thought for His children is farther apparent from the prayer "that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one." Such unity through Divine indwelling is only possible if the idea of human sonship is essentially Divine, as it was manifested in Christ.

If such was the object of the creation, how true are Paul's sayings, "All things are yours," and, "All things work together for good to them that love God" seen to be. The world exists for the fulfilment of God's purpose; and if that purpose was founded in love for those who should be sons and daughters to Him, how surely must that purpose be fulfilled in their experience, however much may for the moment seem to be against it. Well might Paul ask, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

But if we have here a high purpose, it may be asked, Is it not also a narrow one? Is it not in fact the old doctrine of eternal Divine Election that we are here brought back to? Does not Jesus speak of giving Eternal Life to all whom the Father had "given" Him, "the men whom

thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were and thou gavest them to me," and does He not say, "I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me" ? It is certainly election in the sense that those who had believed on Christ had been given to Him out of the world and had been loved by God before the world began. This is the truth in the doctrine which we cannot ignore but, rather, need to realize. But it will be observed that Jesus also prays that those as yet belonging to "the world" may be led to believe and to know that the Father had sent Him, in order that they also might be brought into the sacred circle; for "this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and Him whom thou didst send." The truth that removes all seeming narrowness is that the world itself was created *in Christ* as the Son, and all other sons seen in Him. Those whom the Father loved and gave to Christ were all who should through faith come to share in that life of sonship which was eternal in God and was to be manifested in its power in Jesus in the flesh. "As many as received Him to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe in his name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12). It was *thus* that the Father "gave them" to Christ. It was *in Christ* that He saw them and loved them. Only such could He love with the love of God. But the very purpose of the manifestation of His love in Christ and of His gift of men to Him was, we are told, that the *world* might believe and know the truth, and thus become of the number of those so loved from all eternity. The purpose of the Divine love was not anything that might be selfishly appropriated and rejoiced in by its recipients, but for the sake of the world—"that the world might believe." To this end was it that Jesus prayed that the same love should

dwell in and be manifested by His disciples—those who had already believed, or who should believe on Him through their word.

II.

Here we reach the bearing of this love on Christian Unity. The bringing of "the world" to faith and to God was to be reached through the manifested unity of Christians in that love which had been manifested in Christ, which was to be, not more highly but more extensively, manifested by His brethren. Therefore He prays, "that they may all be one; even as thou Father (art) in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me. And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we (are) one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me" (vers. 21-23); and again, "that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them" (ver. 26). If Christ dwelt in His Church, wholly possessing it, there could not but be unity; for, as Paul said, "Christ is not divided." And it was *thus*, through the love wherewith the Father had loved them from all eternity being *in* them as the principle of their life that Christ Himself, the Son of that same Love, should be in them. It was their possession by and perfect oneness in that Love that should manifest God to the world so that it should believe and be saved. That love in them would be God in them, and when the world sees God manifested in the love that fills the Church, the world will believe in God and in His presence in Christ and His Church. God cannot be fully seen in one individual Christian, or in any number of Christians separated from each other and devoted more or less to other ends than the

service of Love, although something of God may be manifested by them. But just as when we see a physical body in all its parts acting harmoniously for one end, we know that all are possessed by a Life greater than enters any one of them, so, where a Body of men and women are united in a Love that transcends all thoughts of self, the presence of a Higher than themselves, even the Love that God is, is made evident. It is this unity in Love that is so greatly needed. Not a unity in doctrine or organisation, or in what we call Church-work merely, for this might very well exist without that deeper, Diviner unity for which Jesus prayed, and without that sole service of Love which manifests God. It is the unity of all disciples of Christ in that Divine Love which was the very source of their being and which was manifested in Christ, and in the sole service of the love that is the manifestation of God in man. As He had said before: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (chap. xiii. 34, 35); and again: "This is my commandments that ye love one another, even as I have loved you" (xv. 12, also verse 17). As Paul also describes the Church as "a body fitly framed and knit together" making "increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love" (Eph. iv. 16; cf. 1 Cor. xiii. 1-3, where he says though he had all else, but had not love, he was nothing). And as John in his 1st Epistle declares over and over again that Love is the one essential thing: "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is Love." It is in the first place love amongst Christians towards one another, love to be manifested in the Church, not in word only but "in deed and truth," but it is at the same time a Love which goes forth towards all men. For it is the very love that God is, which was

manifested in Christ—"that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them." For the want of this unity in Love the world cannot behold the full manifestation of God in that Church which was meant to be the "Body of Christ" in the world, and "the Habitation (fixed abode) of God in the Spirit." For the lack of this unity in Love the eternal purpose of God's Love cannot find its fulfilment either as respects ourselves or as respects the world.

It is to be specially noted that it is the want of the Love that is the cause of the want of the unity. If the Love that God is, and wherewith He loved us were *in us*, as Jesus sought it to be in us, there would infallibly be the unity He prayed for, and it would be manifested. It could not be otherwise. And if it were manifested, the world would believe. For deep in its heart the world knows that God is and must be Love. It is this Love that it wants and feels that it needs to make it right. The world would see and know that where that Love was manifested in its fulness God Himself was there, the Love that moved and unified all those separate individuals in its sole service. A Higher than man would be thus so manifested that men could not doubt the reality of the Divine presence, and they would be drawn to this God of Love. "Christian unity and love is a moral miracle, a conquest of the resisting will of man, and therefore more convincing than a physical miracle, which is a conquest of unresisting matter. Hence the quarrels of Christians are a perpetual stumblingblock to the world" (Dr. Plummer in *Cambridge Greek Testament*). So supremely important is this Christian unity, and so greatly opposed to the Divine purpose is everything that hinders its realisation or prevents its manifestation, however important we may deem these things in themselves to be.

Now, the indwelling of the Love which would produce this Christian unity is to be reached, Jesus says, by our knowledge of the love of God for us, that love which He had declared to His disciples : “ I made known unto them thy Name, and will make it known ; *that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them,*” and He had said before, “ that the world may know that thou didst send me, and *lovedst them even as thou lovedst me.*” This love of the Father for *Him* was the source of the Divine Love manifested by Him, and, since they had been loved by God with the same love, it should be manifested by them also, and it would be so manifested if *He* were *in* them. As He had said before : “ that ye love one another even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another ” (xiii. 34). Here is the importance of the words we have emphasised. It was the knowledge of that *love for them* that should be the means of its dwelling *in them* as it had dwelt in Christ Himself. But it is not only the world that does not know that love in its fulness : many of us in the Church do not know it, or so believe in it that it may enter our hearts to possess us. We believe that God loves us ; perhaps in a general way we believe that He loved us from all eternity. But we fail to rise to that conception of the love of God which Jesus here teaches His disciples with the purpose of bringing the Divine Love to possess them wholly. We fail to realise that God loved *us* with the same love as went forth to Christ ; that He had *us* in His mind in His creation of the world ; that we are conceived in this close relationship to Himself, and are here to be the organs of His Love—that this is indeed our *only* true and eternal life. We do not grasp the full significance of our sonship to God in and with Christ as being something not of time merely but of Eternity, having its source in that love of the Divine Son and of all other sons

in Him which was the motive and power of the creation. And we fail too greatly to set before ourselves Christ's great Ideal of Unity in Divine Love with its blessed results. We acknowledge the Ideal; but if we are to take it up in earnest and fulfil it, God's love must be in our hearts as an overmastering power, winning all to itself and making us as completely one therein as the Father and the Son are one—"that they may be one even as we are one." In Christ there was such perfect unity with the Father that the Father's will was His sole concern. It was in complete self-surrender to God and self-sacrifice in His cause and for our sakes that the love of God was so effectually manifested in Him. "For their sakes," He says, "I sanctify myself—consecrate or devote myself"—even to the Cross. And He did it that we might be similarly self-consecrated: "As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world. And for their sakes I consecrate myself, that they themselves also may be consecrated in truth." We know how He was in the world, and what the consecration of Himself meant for Him. It was the fulness of the Father's love in Him that led to such complete self-consecration. What we need for the desired unity is the same love, leading to the same consecration, so that all of self may be surrendered, all that is inferior to the sole service of Love subordinated, and only God's purpose move us. "Even Christ pleased not Himself," and "the disciple must be as his Master." It is solely because the Love that dwelt in Christ does not dwell in us in its fulness, as it seeks to dwell in us, that we fail to be *one* as Christ and the Father are one—one through the indwelling of God and of Christ within us. It is for want of that Love that Christian Unity is not realised and manifested, so that we ourselves may be more truly the sons of God and that the world may believe and be saved.

There is a strong feeling to-day, not only in the Church but in the world, for the realisation and manifestation of Christian unity ; even those outside the recognised Church feel that such unity is the proper expression of the faith we profess, and that all that is contrary to it is inconsistent with our Christianity. Serious endeavours are being made after it, and reasonable hopes are entertained that it may be ultimately reached. But the teaching of Christ in this wonderful prayer shows us clearly that only one thing can ever bring it about or be its effective manifestation, and that is the possession of Christian hearts by the love which God had for them, the love that is the very love and life of God Himself in us His sons and daughters. This alone can lead us to rise superior to all that distracts and divides, and to make that Love the one all-controlling principle of individual lives and of Churches. And it is, Jesus taught, the manifestation of that Love in the Church, as one Body united in its sole service, that should be the means of leading the world to God. It was for this, and not for some other reason, that Jesus prayed for this unity. And since it is the very love of God *for* us that is to be *in* us it is important that we should rise to the full height of the conception of that Love as it is stated in this Farewell Prayer of our Lord's.

W. L. WALKER.